

A cup of coffee with a face and name

LWR study tour participants spend two nights with coffee farm families near Matagalpa

A Personal Reflection by Julia Aggen

I was unsure of what to expect as we made our way through the darkness, down a muddy path to the small farm where we would stay for the next two nights. But the home we arrived at, as I would soon find out, is where I learned about true hospitality and the love God has for all people. Our limited communication was sometimes awkward (since we were not fluent in Spanish), but the feeling quickly passed as we became totally immersed in the lives of our host family.

The farm was home to a husband and wife along with their four sons, a daughter-in-law and a granddaughter. One of their sons, Jose Anibal, took us to pick coffee. He showed us how it was depulped and sun-dried. We barely saw some members of the family because everyone works all day long during the busy harvest season.

Despite the lack of electricity and plumbing, they have an incredible sense of pride in their land and home. Like the hope they have for their continued survival, it shone like a beacon of light in a dark economic crisis.

We also saw the hard work it takes to own a coffee farm and the sacrifices it took to get there. It wasn't long before



ANNA ECHELBARGER from Marquette, MI examining coffee beans on her host family's farm.



AFTER PICKING A BASKET OF COFFEE CHERRIES, Julia runs them through a depulping machine. The beans are then washed and dried and the pulp is composted and used as organic fertilizer.

we also realized how being member of CECOCAFEN, a cooperative processor and exporter for local coffee farmer coops, helps this family enjoy a better life than many poorer Nicaraguans. [Note: Equal Exchange buys from CECOCAFEN] Our host family had few material possessions, but they showed us great hospitality. It was humbling for me to examine my own sense of hospitality, having many more material possessions than the people with whom I stayed.

The Holy Spirit impressed upon me God's love for all people in ways that words cannot describe. By supporting these farmers, our lives can be tangibly connected to those of our Nicaraguan brothers and sisters. Truly what I experienced was to see the work of God's hand. It was a tremendous gift.

As we played with their ten-month-old baby, she reached out her hands, smiling, oblivious to the fact that we were foreign, white strangers. She will soon realize the same system of poverty her family fights every day. Our presence there allows for her family's story to be told. We became partners in their struggle. A piece of my heart will always be in Nicaragua; in its place is a sense of God's faithfulness to the poor—God's love for the world.

To learn more about Nicaraguan coffee farmers and arrange for a presentation on the LWR Coffee Project, please contact the Rev. Paul F. Heykes at St. John's of Morgan, 3374 County C, Oconto Falls, WI 54154, or call 920-846-3453, or email revpheykes@msn.com.